



Press Release

Thursday 13 April 2023

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LYRIC HAMMERSMITH THEATRE ANNOUNCES CASTING FOR THE UK PREMIÈRE OF JOCELYN BIOH'S *SCHOOL GIRLS; OR, THE AFRICAN MEAN GIRLS PLAY*

Lyric Hammersmith Theatre today announces casting for the UK première of critically acclaimed smash hit comedy *School Girls; Or, The African Mean Girls Play* by **Jocelyn Bioh** one of America's most exciting writers.

The winner of the 2022 Stage Debut Award for Best Director, **Monique Touko**, directs **Heather Agyepong** (*The Power* - Amazon Prime), **Bola Akeju** (*Ted Lasso* - Apple TV), **Deborah Alli** (*Undercover* – BBC), **Francesca Amewudah-Rivers** (*Bad Education* – BBC), **Jadesola Odunjo** (*You* – Netflix) and **Tara Tijani** (*Death in Paradise* - BBC), with additional casting to be announced. Following 60 productions across the USA, the UK première opens at the Lyric on 14 June, with previews from 8 June, and runs until 15 July.

Jocelyn Bioh says, "*School Girls; Or, The African Mean Girls Play*" is a love letter to young Black girls. I wanted to highlight all that is beautiful and special about us and our place in this world. This play celebrates our humor, joy, heartbreaks, and the deep journey I went on to owning my beauty. I never imagined that I would have an opportunity to share this play with an audience outside of New York City, so I am beyond thrilled to make my UK playwriting debut at the Lyric Hammersmith Theatre. This is such a dream come true; and that I get to work with such an incredible director, cast and design team is the cherry on top of the most delicious theatrical cake!"

Monique Touko adds, "I visited Aburi School for Girls, the school that inspired Jocelyn, on a trip to Ghana at the beginning of the year, and I was reminded of how important the story of and representation in *School Girls; Or, The African Mean Girls Play* is. The play is a comedy with universal appeal and explores the vulnerable, tender moments of teenagehood. These nuanced and jubilant portrayals of Black women aren't seen on stage or screen enough. We have a stellar cast and creative team bringing this message to London and I'm so excited to work with the Lyric Hammersmith Theatre for the show's UK premiere."

School Girls; Or, the African Mean Girls Play

A Lyric Hammersmith Theatre production

Written by **Jocelyn Bioh**

Directed by **Monique Touko**

Thursday 08 June – Saturday 15 July 2023

Press Night: Wednesday 14 June 2023

Set Design: **Paul Wills**; Costume Design: **Kinnetia Isidore**;
Wigs, Hair and Make-up Design: **Cynthia De La Rosa**; Lighting Design: **Matt Haskins**; Sound Design:
Tony Gayle; Movement: **Aline David**; Casting: **Julia Horan CDG**

1986. Ghana's prestigious Aburi Girls Boarding School.

Queen Bee Paulina and her crew excitedly await the arrival of the Miss Ghana pageant recruiter. It's clear that Paulina is in top position to take the title until her place is threatened by Ericka – a beautiful and talented new transfer student. As the friendship group's status quo is upended, who will be chosen for Miss Ghana and at what cost?

Bursting with hilarity and joy, this award-winning comedy explores the universal similarities (and glaring differences) facing teenage girls around the world.

This production is produced in association with Mark Gordon Pictures and Francesca Moody Productions

Jocelyn Bioh (Writer) is an award-winning Ghanaian-American writer/performer from New York City. Her written works for theatre include: *Merry Wives* (Public Theater/Shakespeare in the Park, PBS Great Performances), *Nollywood* (MCC Theater), *Goddess The Musical* (Berkeley Rep) and the multi-award-winning *School Girls; Or the African Mean Girls Play* which was originally produced at MCC Theater in 2017/2018 and has gone on to have nearly 60 regional productions in the USA. She will make her Broadway debut as a playwright with the World Premiere of *Jaja's African Hair Braiding* at Manhattan Theatre Club in the fall of 2023. She is a former TOW playwriting fellow (2017) and has been commissioned by MTC, Atlantic Theater Co., Williamstown Theatre Festival and Second Stage. Jocelyn has also written for TV on *Russian Doll*, Spike Lee's *She's Gotta Have It*, the new Hulu series *Tiny Beautiful Things*, the upcoming new Star Wars series *The Acolyte* and is also writing the live screen adaptation of the hit Broadway musical *Once On This Island* for Disney+. She was the 2022 recipient of the Outstanding Adaptation Drama Desk Award.

Heather Agyepong plays Ama. Her theatre credits include *Celebrated Virgins* (Theatr Clwyd), *The Body Remembers* (Battersea Arts Centre), *Noughts & Crosses* (UK tour), *Girls* (Soho Theatre), *So Many Reasons*, *Best Friends*, (Ovalhouse Theatre), *Hatch* (Hackney Showrooms), *Brent in a Tent*, *Switch* (Kiln Theatre), *Inspiration Day: Alfred The Great* (Kit Theatre), *Jagged Edge* (Acrylic), *Still Barred* (Initiative.dkf), *4.48 Psychosis* and *Antigone* (Theatre 24 Kent). For television, her credits include *The Power*, *This is Going to Hurt* and *Enterprise* and for film; *Sylvia*. Heather is also an artist, with her photography focusing on mental health and wellbeing, invisibility, the diaspora and the archive. Her work exists in a number of collections and she was recently announced as a Nikon European Ambassador.

Bola Akeju plays Mercy. Her theatre credits include *Klippies* (Young Vic), and for television, *Ted Lasso*.

Deborah Alli plays Eloise. Her theatre credits include *Best of Enemies* (Noel Coward Theatre) and *The Lion King* (Lyceum Theatre). For television, her credits include *Undercover*.

Francesca Amewudah-Rivers plays Gifty. Her theatre credits include *The Kola Nut Does Not Speak English* (Bush Theatre), *Macbeth* (Shakespeare's Globe), *Antigone* (Mercury Theatre), *Hear Me Now* (Theatre503), *Random* (Tristan Bates Theatre) and *Run It Back* (Fairfield Halls), and for television her credits include *Bad Education*.

Jadesola Odunjo makes her professional stage debut in the role of Nana. For television, her credits include *You* and *Grime Kids*.

Tara Tijani plays Paulina. Her theatre credits include *Anna Karenina* (Sheffield Theatres), *The Long Song* (Chichester Festival Theatre) and *Writers of the Unexplored* (Royal Court). For television, her credits include *Death in Paradise* and for film; *Pray*.

Monique Touko (Director) is a London based multidisciplinary artist working in theatre, radio and film. Her skill set includes facilitation, devising, international work, new writing, script reading, drama school shows and projects, training actors, and working with young people. Monique won the Stage Debut Award for Best Director in 2022 for *Malindadzimu* – her professional debut. Recent theatre credits include: *The Clinic* (Almeida); *Fair Play* (Bush Theatre); *Malindadzimu* (Hampstead Theatre). Her assisting credits include: *Wishlist* (Royal Exchange Manchester and Royal Court); *Yellowman* (Young Vic); *On the Exhale* (Traverse Theatre), *Cock* (Chichester Festival Theatre); *Richard II* (Shakespeare's Globe Theatre), *Rosmersholm* (Duke of York Theatre); *Blood Wedding* (Young Vic).

YOUNG LYRIC

In response to *School Girls; Or, the African Mean Girls Play*, Young Lyric will deliver a two-week performance project with 15 local West Londoners aged 16 – 21. Theatrically exploring the concept of 'toxic femininity' the project will culminate in a new performance piece celebrating the joy in difference, diversity and individual cultural identity.

- ENDS -

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Supported by
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ENGLAND**



Notes to Editors

IMAGES available to download here <https://we.tl/t-2vwrbCd0u3>

Listings

Lyric Hammersmith Theatre
Lyric Square, King Street, London, W6 0QL
Box office: 020 8741 6850
www.lyric.co.uk
Tickets from £10

Twitter: [@LyricHammer](https://twitter.com/LyricHammer)

Instagram: [/LyricHammersmith](https://www.instagram.com/LyricHammersmith)

Facebook: [/LyricHammersmith](#)

LISTINGS

A Lyric Hammersmith Theatre, ETT and Sheffield Theatres production
Commissioned by ETT

The Good Person of Szechwan

By **Bertolt Brecht**

Adapted by **Nina Segal**

Directed by **Anthony Lau**

Dates: Saturday 15 April - Saturday 13 May 2023

Press Night: Thursday 20 April, 7pm

Open Captioned Performance: Thursday 4 May, 7.30pm

BSL Performance: Tuesday 9 May, 7.30pm

Audio Described Performance: Tuesday 2 May, 7.30pm

Lyric Hammersmith Theatre presents

For the Culture – Celebrations of Blackness

Curated by **Nicholai La Barrie**

Summer 2023

Full festival events to be announced soon

A Lyric Hammersmith Theatre production

School Girls; Or, the African Mean Girls Play

By **Jocelyn Bioh**

Directed by **Monique Touko**

Dates: Thursday 08 June – Saturday 15 July 2023

Press Night: Wednesday 14 June, 7pm

Open Captioned Performance: Friday 7 July, 7.30pm

Chilled Environment Performance: Wednesday 28 June, 2.30pm

BSL Performance: Tuesday 4 July, 7.30pm

Audio Described Performance: Tuesday 27 June, 7.30pm

A Lyric Hammersmith Theatre production

God of Carnage

By **Yasmina Reza**

Translated by **Christopher Hampton**

Directed by **Nicholai La Barrie**

Dates: Friday 01 – Saturday 30 September 2023

Press Night: Wednesday 06 September 2023, 7pm

Open Captioned Performance: Fri 15 September, 7.30pm

Chilled Environment Performance: Wednesday 20 September, 2.30pm

BSL Performance: Thursday 21 September, 7.30pm

Audio Described Performance: Tuesday 26 September, 7.30pm

A Royal Shakespeare Company production

The Empress

By **Tanika Gupta**

Directed by **Pooja Ghai**

Dates: Wednesday 04 – Saturday 28 October 2023

Press Night: Tuesday 10 October 2023, 7pm

Audio Described Performance: Tuesday 17 October, 7.30pm

Chilled Environment Performance: Wednesday 18 October, 1.30pm
Open Captioned Performance: Friday 20 October, 7.30pm
Integrated BSL Performance: Friday 27 October, 7.30pm
Swan Theatre Stratford-upon-Avon dates: Friday 7 July- Saturday 18 November

A Lyric Hammersmith Theatre production

Cinderella

By **Vikki Stone**

Dates: Saturday 18 November 2023 – Saturday 06 January 2024

Press Day: Saturday 25 November 2023, 2pm and 6pm

Relaxed Performance: Tuesday 05 December, 10am

Audio Described Performance: Thursday 14 December, 7pm

Open Captioned Performance: Wednesday 20 December, 6pm

BSL Performance: Wednesday 27 December, 2pm

A Lyric Hammersmith Theatre and Pins and Needles co-production

Raymond Brigg's Father Christmas 2023

Dates: Wednesday 22 November – Saturday 30 December 2023

A Frantic Assembly, Theatre Royal Plymouth, Curve, MAST Mayflower Studios and Lyric Hammersmith Theatre co-production

Metamorphosis

By **Franz Kafka**

Adapted by **Lemn Sissay OBE**

Directed by **Scott Graham**

Dates: Thursday 01 February 2024 - Saturday 02 March 2024

Press Night: Tuesday 06 February 2024, 7pm

Audio Described Performance: Tuesday 13 February 2024, 7.30pm

Open Captioned Performance: Friday 16 February 2024, 7.30pm

BSL Performance: Monday 19 February 2024, 7.30pm

Chilled Environment Performance: Wednesday 21 February 2024, 1.30pm

A Lyric Hammersmith Theatre production

Faith Healer

Written by **Brian Friel**

Directed by **Rachel O'Riordan**

Dates: Thursday 14 March – Saturday 13 April 2024

Press Night: Wednesday 20 March 2024, 7pm

Chilled Environment Performance: Wednesday 27 March 2024, 2.30pm

Open Captioned Performance: Tuesday 02 April 2024, 7.30pm

Audio Described Performance: Monday 08 April 2024, 7.30pm

BSL Performance: Thursday 11 April 2024, 7.30pm